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# Static synapse

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# Static Synapse

By

Jessica Jane Julius

A Thesis Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master in Fine Arts

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ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

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Month, Date, Year

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## List of Images

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- II. Detail, “Hybrid”, cast black glass, rub on letters, 16ft x 32 in, 2006
- III. “Bonefinger”, photogram of clear cast glass, 40in x 22in, 2006
- IV. “Static”, lampworked black glass, photogram of clear glass, 18ft x 6 ft x 8ft, 2006
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## **Introduction**

Art and Science express the human desire to understand what we see. They push us to question our surroundings and consistently correct and replace old knowledge and beliefs. They are creative ways of understanding, representing, and communicating using different languages and symbolic systems. Both show us how to search life for meaning, how to analyze our perceptions, experiences, and creations, and how to communicate our personal and collective imaginings: while also inspiring us to appreciate the depth and reach of our imaginations. We would not be able to understand the world without these two unique forms of knowledge. Each offers a multitude of possibilities for enriching our lives and influences the shape and health of society.

## Chapter 1

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the use of technology, the western world changed from a text based society to a visually dependent society. Visual learning became not just a luxury but essential to our modern day life and education. The development of optical equipment made originally to help understand the world now supplies us with mass-produced images. Our realities through these images are fantasized and cosmetized existing of fabricated worlds on TV and computer screens. Microscopes, scanning devices, and telescopes allow us to visually reach beyond the limits of our eyes and open up the micro and macro worlds of our existence.

This use of technology has created different categories of study. For example, there are specific studies of parts of the body, dermatoscopy- the study of skin folds, dactyloscopy- the study of fingerprinting, metoposcopy- the study of lines in the forehead. All of these scientific studies have systems of observing, analyzing, and categorizing in order to organize information into a structure of understanding. Categorization is fundamental in prediction, inference, decision-making, and many interactions with the environment. It is the process in which ideas and objects are recognized, differentiated and understood. It involves grouping subjects together in order to illuminate relationships and to find similarities and differences.

Throughout history what transpires from observing and communicating in science has been taken as “truth”, something that is proven through facts. Scientist however are always acquiring new knowledge to correct and integrate into old knowledge. As artist we question the ideas of truth, how we see things culturally and physically and attempting to reveal new ways of looking and communicating. Artists have personal

truth in their creative process and work. Ideas of validating and saying things are good or bad in art relates to how we view things in life. It is an endless questioning of our perceptions of our environment and how and what we choose to communicate.

The body is center of our perspective of the world. As babies we learn our environment and how to interact with it through our senses, touch, sight, hearing, smell, taste. When we are young we are also taught image identification and how to categorize in order to understand. For example to see an image of a red pepper, we know it is a red pepper because it has certain characteristics that we can identify even though every pepper is unique.

Within the post modern era, a time of computers and fast paced imagery there is a need for a re-emergence in art of materiality. Now our bodies' interaction with the world largely relies on button pushing. We exist in a world based on fabricated realities spread through 2 dimensional images that deny our physical perceptions of the world. The importance of material and material interaction with the body is becoming more essential.

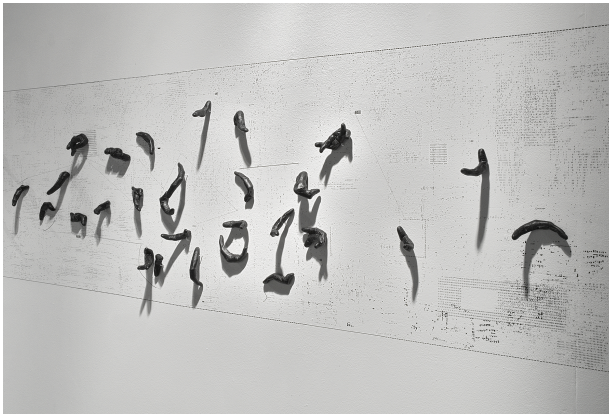
Dennis Doordan states, "...everything is made out of something. Materials take you back and forth across history, across the spectrum of making from the so-called fine arts to the so-called applied arts, craft, art, and industrial production." My material choices and how I have used them conceptually and technically cross into multiple categories in art and craft.

How materials and what materials are used within a work will categorize it within art history and discourse. These categories, such as art and craft, have created boundaries of how people look at material usage. Not many artist break through these boundaries (or not fit in any) categories in art. Josiah McElheny is an example of a rare few who have cross-pollinated into art and craft. In an article by Gregory Volk in *Art in America*, 2006 states "Josiah McElheny is a decided unusual figure in that he has chosen to work primarily in hand-blown glass at a time when few glass artists enjoy significant attention from the art world at large." And "McElheny scramble historical eras, willfully fuses fiction and fact, and imbues his objects with a dense array of conceptual, historical, social and political concerns that typically vault far beyond issues of craft and technical

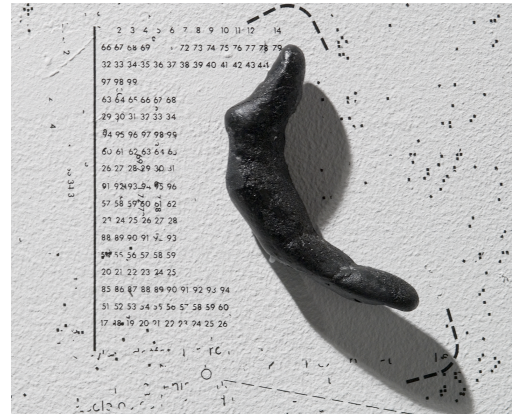
prowess.” These statements show the type of biases in place in art and how in all fields of study we categorize to understand.

Material choices and techniques within a work must be specific to the idea trying to be conveyed. By choosing certain materials you can bring into a work history of that material, other representations of weight, texture, form, and other metaphorical representations. A universal perception of a material can be used with a work, for example glass can symbolize fragility and memory. Every material has a universal perception; something it can imply and the artist can either exploit this perception through amplifying or denying it.

## Chapter 2



I



II

### Hybrid

Our perception of the world largely relies on the sense of touch. It is a form of communication and an instrument of understanding space. The body is central in perception for Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. They dwell on the constitution of objects, or more explicitly 'things', as arising from the body's interaction with the world. With growing technology we are experiencing a loss of the tactile perception. The Internet's capability to create completely simulated worlds is uprooting our bodily aesthetic experiences.

The work "Hybrid" consists of opaque black glass fingers and a data system of rub-on-letters. Through isolating a part of the body it becomes a foreign object however recognizable. The finger focuses on the action of touching, pointing, and defining information and also represents our tactile experience. Being small objects with characteristics of actual fingers through, realistic size, fingerprints, quality of skin however manipulated to have dual finger ends. The objects are placed on the wall in a way where they are pointing or containing parts of the data representing an act of touch

and inquiry in the same way we learn about the world through our fingers. Through the interface of the objects with the numbers, letters, and symbols the work talks about how we categorize, focus, and analyze with the use of technology, data, and systems. The impermanency of the work stresses the changing of information through time and how our systems change with new information and new discoveries.

There is a dialogue with all of the work in the exhibition through material choices, the unique approach of techniques, and the system of presentation of information. The importance of the opacity of the black fingers opposed to the prints taken from transparent glass fingers heightens how these objects have transformed. The intentionality of how the materials in each work are handled creates a dialogue between the works that engages the viewer in multiple perspectives of micro and macro.



III

### Photograms

My inspiration for these prints is from documents of early microscopic discoveries. These early hand drawn records showed forms that exist beyond what we can see with our eyes. The photographic process of using the enlarger to project light through an object of glass and enlarges the view of the object in the same way a microscope functions. This process creates a metamorphosis of our perception of the object and our body. The object that is used to make the print compared to the photo image becomes less important and easily dismissed. However the photo image takes on a completely different impact through its scale, contrast, and detail while retaining the same qualities of the original.

The series of “finger prints” contain convincing realistic body characteristics

combined with surreal, ethereal qualities. Many of the prints have ambiguous markings, a small number, letter, or symbol, to suggest a forensic examination. Because the image resembles a detached finger through form and representation of skin texture, it suggests ideas of dissection and study. Therefore it is important for these images to be beautiful not only in design and composition but in color, line quality, and surface. By creating something beautiful it creates an attraction to allow the viewer to connect to the piece despite the subject matter.



IV



V

## Static

Emotions are sensations felt in reaction to the world. They arise spontaneously rather than through a conscious effort. Charles Darwin believes emotions evolved through natural selection, therefore having cross-cultural universal counterparts. Emotions are unique to individuals only through what they are reacting to however are universal in how they reside in our subconscious.

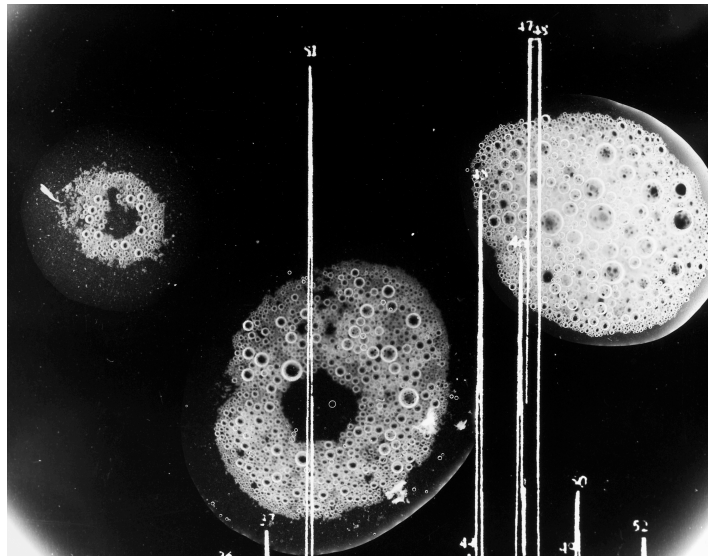
A dream is the experience of envisioned images, sounds, or other sensations during sleep. Sigmund Freud theorized that dreams are a reflection of human desires and are prompted by external stimuli such as our environments. There is an emotional connection to images in dreams that is universal. For example, many people dream of their teeth falling out which can be interpreted as stress. Joe Griffin states “dreams are metaphorical translations of waking expectations. Expectations that cause emotional arousal that are not acted upon during the day.” Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung identify dreams as an interaction between the unconscious and the conscious. Jung argues that the



dream's bizarre quality is an efficient language comparable to poetry and uniquely capable of revealing underlying meaning.

“Static” was an attempt at transforming emotion into form. The inspiration for this work comes from a reoccurring dream. Within the dream an infinite 3 dimensional black line fills my vision and releases a low pitch constant hum. I am without body or form just aware of feeling. The line becomes tense and starts to vibrate like a heart beat monitor. The intensity builds until I wake up perspiring.

Contained within it's own section of the gallery is thousands of glass stingers that are bent and piled into a structure and are pointing at a print that is mounted and floating 2 inches from the wall. The print of the mouth in this piece has only the border of the edge of the print and the image is not detached from the body therefore suggesting a larger whole. Because the static is made out of glass it suggests fragility to evoke an uneasy feeling.



VI

### Spit prints

The “Spit Print” series contains information that exists from human saliva however through enlargement have removed the physicality and cultural connotations of the saliva. The viscous quality of the images can resemble qualities of glass or other fluid materials. The rings of the bubbles look somewhat like a topographical map of a moon

surface giving a sense of micro and macro. This metamorphosis of discarded bodily fluid, something socially found to be disgusting, becomes beautiful and unknown.

Artist in the 1970's until present have been exploring the boundaries of the social body as a subject and body fluids have been used to make statements about our social limits of the body. For example Andres Serrano created a series of photographs in 1987 called "Piss" that are taken of actual urine however the prints resemble a minimalist painting of a color field. Andy Warhol with his "oxidation" painting series uses urine to oxidize metal to make abstract images. In Susan Stewart's book "On Longing" she discusses the privatization from society of body openings and the functions of the body creates individual self and personal space. She defines the boundaries of the body through the skin and the openings in the skin, (eyes, ears, mouth, and anus, etc.) are what divide the interior and exterior of the body. "Products which cross such boundaries thereby become products of great cultural attention. What is both inside and outside the body (feces, spittle, urine, menstrual blood, etc...) tends to become taboo because of its ambiguous and anomalous status." She discusses how societies regulations of the body's basic functions help define individuality. The "Spit Prints" therefore through material choice and process create emotional connections to the body, connecting the viewer's own individuality to the work.

## Conclusion

Art/Science represents a new domain of communication born from the integration of the arts and the sciences. It combines more than two million years of creative tendencies, inventions, languages, and explorations. Art/Science explores and recombines concepts, theories, models, and interpretations of our environments to influence the evolution and heredity of ideas that are crucial to human development and survival. Art/Science is slowly transforming the physical, mental, and behavioral traits of the organism of art.

Within this body of work I have combined unique combinations of art and science vocabularies and material investigations creating a personal system of communication and truth. Through this voice I have attempted to create visual narratives exploring emotional associations existing between the individual and society and created a site for investigation of issues of beauty, identity, abjection, and transience within society.

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